



TRAINING IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST SOLUTION

BEYOND TRAINING

Most training and development professionals know that structured courses and programs are not the only solutions available – or suitable – to help build individual and organizational capability. In fact, they’re often the least efficient and effective solution.

THE LIMITS OF THE ‘TRAINING SOLUTION’

Training can only address challenges due to lack of knowledge or skills. However, research suggests that for the majority of performance problems, lack of knowledge or skill is only part of the cause, or not a factor at all. More often, people know what to do and how to do it, but they don’t carry it through for a range of other reasons. When root causes of underperformance are analyzed, other factors such as lack of clear objectives, poor leadership and the lack of opportunities to practice and reflect are more likely to undermine performance than not knowing what to do.

Despite this, training is often the only pill offered from the medicine cabinet. Even when lack of knowledge and skills are the root cause, training is not always the best solution. How many of us attended a course to learn how to use our cell phones or master our TVs and DVD players? We probably learned through a mix of reading the instructions and trying things out. Even then, it was only through experience and practice that we gained advanced skills – if we ever did – and became fully proficient.

THE PRESSURES FOR CHANGE

The “training solution” is coming under increasing pressure in many organizations. In many ways this is a good thing and likely to result in changes that will result in more effective learning and performance strategies and solutions.

The demand for speed is a key driver for change. Speed for effective solution design and speed to competence is driving alternative approaches to training. When a challenge or problem is identified the expectation is that a solution be produced rapidly and will, in turn, deliver rapid results - not several weeks later.

The inherent inertia in the analysis, design, develop, implement model of content-centric training solutions often holds back the training solution from delivering at the required speed. The pressures of work is another factor. Many jobs no longer have the flexibility to take time away from the workflow to attend training courses or programs.

The question then is: What are the alternatives to training if we want to support the development of high-performing people, teams and organizations?

EVOLUTIONARY OR REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE OPTIONS

The answer is: There are many alternatives, but selecting the right ones requires careful analysis and consideration.

In my work with organizations implementing the 70:20:10 framework, I usually explain that the first decision they need to take when expanding their approach to solving performance problems is whether to adopt an evolutionary or a revolutionary approach. The evolutionary approach involves “extending the blend,” although it is often much more than that. This usually involves deconstructing existing training solutions and reconstructing them with a smaller “core” of structured training and incorporating social and workplace learning elements as “wrapping.”

The revolutionary approach involves a review of learning and development strategy and the adoption of informal workplace and social learning at the centre of the solution set rather than at the periphery. A successful revolutionary approach requires a totally different strategy based on “pull” learning and the idea of extracting learning from work rather than injecting learning into work.

Either way, there is a strong imperative for training and development professionals to step beyond the training solution.

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